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## THE CONCEPT OF WARRANTED ASSERTIBILITY IN DEWEY AS THE HEART OF HIS INSTRUMENTAL PRAGMATISM

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**Resumo:** Pragmatism started in the second half of the 19th century in North America and, in many respects, is still with us today. This school of thought has been hugely influential in many areas such as in the philosophy of language, science, logic and metaphysics; in the philosophy of mind, ethics, aesthetics and in the philosophy of religion. This article introduces Dewey's specific kind of pragmatism in the context of classical American Pragmatism, represented by Peirce and James. We then examine the formation of the core of Dewey's instrumental pragmatism – his concept of *warranted assertibility*. The analysis is based on five pragmatic themes – *pluralism, anti-foundationalism, fallibilism, the agents of perspective* and *the communities of inquirers* –; one scientific paradigm – *Darwinian evolutionism* – and one philosophical – *Kantian German Idealism*. We propose the importance of Dewey's enduring legacy lies in the fact that his concept of *warranted assertibility* involves discussions of the relations between philosophy of language and philosophy of conduct, between rationality, discursive intentionality, responsibility and ethics.

**Palavras-Chave:** Classical Pragmatism. Warranted Assertibility. Discourse. Ethics.

### O CONCEITO DE DISCURSOS JUSTIFICÁVEIS EM DEWEY COMO CORAÇÃO DE SEU PRAGMATISMO INSTRUMENTAL

**Abstract:** O Pragmatismo começou na segunda metade do século XIX na América do Norte e, em muitos aspectos, ainda está presente hoje. Essa escola de pensamento tem sido extremamente influente em muitas áreas, como na filosofia da linguagem, ciência, lógica e metafísica; na filosofia da mente, ética, estética e na filosofia da religião. Este artigo apresenta o tipo específico de pragmatismo de Dewey no contexto do pragmatismo clássico norte-americano, representado por Peirce e James. Em seguida, examinamos a formação do núcleo do pragmatismo instrumental de Dewey - seu conceito de 'discursos justificáveis'. A análise é baseada em cinco temas pragmáticos - pluralismo, anti-fundacionismo, falibilismo, os agentes de perspectiva e as comunidades de investigações -; um paradigma científico - o evolucionismo Darwiniano - e um filosófico - o Idealismo Alemão Kantiano. Propomos que a importância do legado duradouro de Dewey reside no fato de que seu conceito de

'discursos justificáveis' envolve discussões das relações entre a filosofia da linguagem e a filosofia da conduta, entre racionalidade, intencionalidade discursiva, responsabilidade e ética.

**Keywords:** Pragmatismo clássico. Discursos Justificáveis. Discurso. Ética.

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## First remarks

Fricker (2015) appropriately remarks that William James, Charles Sanders Peirce and John Dewey - the three classical pragmatists – were the founders of Pragmatism, an American philosophical movement which flowered during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century and the first twenty years of the 20th century. Pragmatism, continues Fricker (2015), took knowledge to be meaningful only when coupled with action. The function of thought was not to represent the world, but instead to be used as an instrument or tool for problem-solving and action. Pragmatism, concludes Fricker (2015), is a philosophy deeply embedded in the realities of life, concerned firstly with the individual's direct experience of the world he or she inhabits.

John Dewey (1859 - 1952), the son of a modest New England trader, grew up in Burlington Vermont and started his professional career as a high school teacher. Later, he went to attend one of the first institutions in America to offer a PhD, Johns Hopkins. Dewey was a relatively modest person, but in the reverent words of Bernstein (2013), he eventually became the most influential philosopher and public intellectual in America largely because he embarked in an ambitious project of reconstruction of philosophy.

For Bacon (2012), Dewey shares Peirce's view that pragmatism will show that many philosophical problems can safely be set aside and seeks to show that such problems result from particular historical contingencies and that the need to address them today may have passed. In *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920) and *The Quest for Certainty: a study of the relation between knowledge and action* (1929), Dewey states that philosophy reflects not timeless questions but rather the need to provide a rational justification for early beliefs stemming from custom and tradition: "It had a mission to perform, and it was sworn in advance to that mission. It had to extract the essential moral kernel out of the threatened traditional beliefs of the past" (DEWEY, 1920, p. 18).

Dewey's claims are based on a pragmatic shift from Newtonian to Darwinian science. Whereas Newtonian science sought the immutable physical laws which underlie all areas of life, Dewey took from Darwin a focus on the importance of the temporary and contingent over the universal, necessary and eternal principles in Newton's physics. In this Darwinian perspective, Dewey defines beliefs and habits as tools which help us adapt to changes in the environment. Conceptions, theories and systems of thought are tools: "As in the case of all tools, their value resides not in themselves but in their capacity to work shown in the consequences of their use" (DEWEY, 1920, p. 145).

In *Experience and Nature* (1929a), Dewey offers re-descriptions of philosophical concepts based on Darwinian science. Dewey establishes here causal connections between experience and mind, between meaning and social practices. Dewey holds that even seemingly private experiences depend upon our relations to

the external world: “everyday experience (...) is saturated with the result of social intercourse and communication” (DEWEY, 1929a, p. v-vi). Mind is a product of social interaction and our thoughts are given meaning by the role they play in social life: “every meaning is generic or universal. It is something common between speaker, hearer and the thing to which speech refers” (DEWEY, 1929a, p. 221). In that respect, Quine (1961) was among the first to point out that Dewey long preceded the second Wittgenstein in insisting that meaning develops through the social use of language.

### Dewey’s Instrumental Pragmatism

The particular kind of pragmatism developed by Dewey is often called instrumental, as opposed to Peirce’s more logical or James’s more psychological varieties of pragmatism. Our purpose in this article is to analyse the formation and the role of his concept of *warranted assertibility* as a synthesis of his instrumental pragmatism. We intend to do that by examining some key pragmatic themes such as *pluralism*, *anti-foundationalism*, *fallibilism*, *the agents of perspective* and *the community of inquirers*. We also intend to trace and discuss the origins of this central Deweyan concept in the *German Idealism* of Emmanuel Kant.

Anticartesianism, one of the pillars of classic pragmatism, significantly helped to fuel Dewey’s reform of philosophy. Dewey sought to escape nihilism and relativism by exorcising what Bernstein (2010) properly called *Cartesian anxiety*. Bernstein (1991) maintains that one of the strengths of the classical pragmatists was to have seen that the psychological fears of Cartesian anxiety were the products of historically, contingent and questionable issues.

Peirce, James and specially Dewey showed that the Cartesian systematic doubt was an overreaction and that we are able to make (common) sense of our beliefs, values and commitments independent of back-up from the fixed foundations offered by religion or philosophy, while at the same time resisting nihilism and relativism. Bernstein (1991) further points out that one of the major themes in philosophy during the past hundred years has been that it is a mistake to think that science requires strong foundational justification before any investigation can proceed.

On the question of how we can we distinguish better from worse reasons, Dewey suggested that philosophy must attend to what he called the “precious values embedded in social traditions” (DEWEY, 1920, p. 26). Dewey understands that we have much to gain if we come to appreciate and critically engage with the plurality of beliefs that constitutes our traditions.

Pluralism is then the first pragmatic theme to inform the Deweyan concept of *warranted assertibility*. Bernstein (1991) distinguishes four different forms of pluralism. He calls the first form ‘fragmenting pluralism’ in which different groups are pushed apart and no communication takes place between them. He calls the second one ‘flabby pluralism’ when the acceptance of other ideas is superficial and without any serious attempt to understand them. The third form is called ‘polemical pluralism’, when one seems to respect diversity until one’s is in a position to set it aside in order to install his or her own perspective as the single truth. Finally, in ‘defensive pluralism’ freedom is abused, responsibility and accountability are ignored because one wishes to act as his passions dictated it.

For Bernstein (1991), each of these understandings of pluralism fails to be open to alternatives because they all restrict one's interest to a specific group out of the belief that there is nothing of value to be learnt from others. Bernstein (1991) proposes in contrast a fifth form that he calls 'engaged fallibilistic pluralism' in which we seek to understand each other and criticize our own views as well as those we encounter.

Bernstein (1991) argues that an 'engaged fallibilistic pluralism' requires the cultivation of specific habits of inquiry based on principles such as openness, fairness and an attitude of willingness to change our minds and use our imagination. Bernstein (1971) believes that only by the cultivation of these habits we can advance our knowledge and reconstruct human experience funded with meaning, freedom and logic.

As an alternative way of thinking, the concept of *warranted assertibility* in Dewey presupposes an intricate pluralistic interplay of two other themes characteristic of the pragmatic tradition – fallibilism and anti-foundationalism. For Bernstein (2013) and Sellars (1997), inquiry is a self-correcting activity that can put any claim into jeopardy, which means that all knowledge and all validity claims are fallible in the sense that we can never claim that we know everything. Many of our beliefs are indubitable in the sense that we have no reason to doubt them and indeed might not even be aware that we have such beliefs, but what is indubitable today may turn out to be false tomorrow.

Furthermore, fallibilism is not to be confused with epistemological scepticism. Bernstein (2010), thus, follows Putnam and observes that the great contribution of the classic pragmatists is to show that fallibilism and anti-scepticism are compatible. Peirce, for example, never doubted that we can know a reality that is independent of our self, but he also argued we are never in a position to claim that we know this with absolute certainty. The validity of a given theory or explanatory hypothesis is not dependent on showing they rest on an absolute foundation but rather that it is supported by the best empirical evidence available presently.

Every serious scientist today knows that our current theories and hypotheses will most likely be modified or even abandoned in light of further inquiry and evidence. However, it would be an exaggeration to say that we do not know anything because any knowledge claim that we make may turn out to be false. Rather, Bernstein (2013) concludes, the pragmatic point is that all knowledge is fallible and corrigible in principle.

Then the question arises: if we cannot know anything with absolute certainty how can we warrant and secure our knowledge claims? And the solution comes in the form of the pragmatic association of two more themes - *the agents of perspective* and *the community of inquirers*.

Bernstein (2013) remarks Dewey not only criticized the quest for certainty, which characterised so much of the history of philosophy, but he also criticised what he called *the spectator theory of knowledge*. Dewey observed that much of philosophy has been dominated by ocular or Platonic metaphors, where knowing has been conceived as a form of seeing with the mind's eye. Presumably, we can directly acquire knowledge without the use of the rational discourse of internal forms through the means of intellectual intuitions of clear and distinct ideas. However, with the rise of experimental science we have come to realise that knowing is not just a

form of contemplation, but that it involves active experimentation and problem-solving and here enters Dewey's 'theory of the agents of perspective'.

Knowing is a form of doing involving intelligent action, routine practices and imagination. Dewey holds that wherever there is life, there is behaviour and activity and this activity has to be continuous and adapted to the environment. And this adaptive adjustment affects both the organism and the environment: "In the interests of maintenance of life there is transformation of some element in the surrounding medium" (DEWEY, 1920, p. 85).

The next point is the role of the community of inquirers and the sociology of practices. Bernstein (2013) believes Peirce was one of the first to emphasize the importance of this concept through which we can test the validity of our claims by opening them to public criticism of others again using scientific inquiry. No hypothesis, no theory should be accepted as correct simply because it is affirmed with absolute conviction. New hypotheses must be subjected to relentless criticism by the relevant community of inquirers, a concept akin to Popper's conceptual scheme of conjectures and refutations. Inquiry advances through the process of making bold conjectures and then subjecting them to rigorous testing and refutation. The classical pragmatists, concludes Bernstein (2013), go even further for they argue that we are quintessentially social beings in the sense that we are always being shaped by society, but that does not mean we are completely determined by the social practices in which we participate.

Now, on the subject of the *German Idealism* roots of classic pragmatism, Brandom (2015) understands pragmatists inherited from Kant his normative turn in the form of a very distinctive methodology. For Brandom (2015), broadly speaking, Peirce, James and Dewey developed this German idealist tradition by completing the process of naturalising it, a process which had already begun with Hegel. In their hands, it was to take the form of an empirical scientific account of man and his transactions with the environment.

Brandom (2015) defines Kant's most basic idea, or the axis around which all his thought turns, as the very nature of reason or rationality. It is the exercise of judgment and intentional agency that makes men different from the performances of merely natural creatures. And our judgments and actions are what they are because they are subject to distinctive kinds of normative assessment. And judgments and actions are things that we are in a distinctive sense responsible for. It is important to stress that the pragmatic theme 'the agents of perspective' is clearly related to Kant's 'intentional agency' and that both concepts are essential for the development of the Deweyan concept of *warranted assertibility*, as are the concepts of 'normative assessment and responsibility'.

Brandom (2015) explains it is in the differences between practical abilities and conceptual representation that we can distinguish two grades of intentionality: practical and discursive. Practical intentionality is the kind of attunement to their environment that intelligent non-linguistic animals display, the way they can practically take or treat things as prey or predator, food, sexual partner or rival and cope with them accordingly. Discursive intentionality means being able to use concepts in judgment and intentional action, being able to explicitly take things to be thus and so, to entertain and evaluate propositions, to formulate rules and principles of action.

Brandom (2015) proposes a rationalist criterion of demarcation of the linguistic and hence of discursiveness can be used to distinguish sapient from merely sentient beings. The difference lies in our capacity of giving and asking for reasons. A necessary and sufficient condition of discursive practice is that performances are accorded by the practical pragmatic significance of assertions. Semantically *warranted* or *assertable* contents or propositional contents are syntactically expressed in the form of declarative sentences. This combination of pragmatic, semantic and syntactic features, asserting or claiming propositional content and declarative sentences is the Iron Triangle of discursiveness and rationality.

### **Deweyan Concept of *Warranted Assertibility***

After having examined the chief elements which constitute the concept of *warranted assertibility* and having explained *how* it was formed, it is time to devote some attention to the questions concerning *why* Dewey thought it was necessary to develop it as part of his theory of knowledge and investigation.

Dewey (1939) argues that inquiry should be seen in naturalistic terms, as when an organism seeks to secure equilibrium with its environment. Inquiry is triggered when we confront a situation in which there is some issue or undetermined situation that must be resolved. We try to transform an indeterminate situation into one which is determinate by examining possible solutions, tentatively adopting a hypothesis which we then investigate to see whether it answers our needs. If a hypothesis succeeds in answering a need by transforming an indeterminate situation into one which is determinate, it is said to be *warranted*:

If inquiry begins in doubt, it terminates in the institution of conditions which remove the need for doubt. The later state of affairs may be designated by the words *belief* and *knowledge*. For reasons that I shall state later, I prefer the words *warranted assertibility* (DEWEY, 1939, p. 7).

In *How We Think* (1910), Dewey defines *warranted assertibility* as a method of science in which investigation is a matter of arriving at well-grounded beliefs, which answer to our objective situation rather than to our individual needs. Dewey shares Peirce's view that this requires attending to the methods by which beliefs are fixated<sup>1</sup> by testing hypotheses with reference to evidence. He outlines it as follows:

Upon examination, each instance reveals, more or less clearly, five logically distinct steps: (i) a felt difficulty; (ii) its location and definition; (iii) suggestion of possible solution; (iv) development by reasoning of the bearings of the suggestion; (v) further observation and experiment leading to its acceptance or rejection; that is, the conclusion of belief or disbelief (DEWEY, 1910, p. 72).

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<sup>1</sup> PEIRCE, Charles S. The Fixation of Belief. In: *Popular Science Monthly* 12 November 1877.

The methods of science places normative authority within the communities of inquirers where investigators treat claims in their capacity as members of a social practice governed by shared norms. Scientists cannot simply appeal to common sense or tradition but are required to test their claims through experiments and are expected to give up a hypothesis if evidence requires it. No scientific inquirer can keep what he finds to himself or turn it to merely private account without losing his scientific standing. Everything discovered belongs to the community of workers: “every new idea and theory has to be submitted to this community for confirmation and test” (DEWEY, 1984, p. 115). It is worth pointing out that, Dewey thinks his experimentalism, although modelled on laboratory science, is of relevance to all areas of human life in order to address the efforts, aspirations and problems of men.

We can see especially here that Dewey’s instrumental pragmatism is broader than Peirce’s logical pragmatism. Although they agree on much, Dewey thinks pragmatism has application in more areas than Peirce was prepared to accept. Dewey envisions the application of the methods of science to every part of life. Science is rooted in social life and its methods and techniques – open-mindedness, flexibility and preparedness to accept new findings – are kinds of scientific attitudes which Dewey strongly felt ought to be shared by everyone, everywhere, including in political and social matters.

While it would be absurd to believe it desirable or possible for everyone to become a scientist when Science is defined from the side of subject matter, the future of democracy is allied with the spread of the scientific attitude (DEWEY, 1988, p. 168).

It is important to stress, however, that *warranted assertibility* and truth are different concepts for Dewey. Bertrand Russell, one of the most vicious critics of American pragmatism, misunderstood Dewey to be saying that they were equivalent and, therefore, Dewey was claiming truth could be relative and provisional. But Dewey set the record straight in his reply to Russell. In *Propositions, Warranted Assertibility, and Truth* (1941), Dewey spelled out that he was actually using Peirce’s definition of truth as “the opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate” (DEWEY, 1939, p. 345). Dewey’s preference for speaking not of truth but of *warranted assertibility* lies in the fact that he does not believe in the notion of truth as some fixed state and prefers to speak instead of the *process of securing truth*: “To say that a man seeks health or justice is only to say that he seeks to live healthily or justly. These things, like truth, are adverbial. They are modifiers of action in special cases” (DEWEY, 1920, p. 167).

### **Habermas’ Deweyan Legacy**

Pragmatism has influenced a long and varied list of thinkers across space and time. Bernstein (2010) talks about a period of influence of over 150 years if we consider from classic to neo-pragmatism. We would like to briefly consider the case of Habermas for his connections with Dewey and, especially, because of some perceived articulation between their concepts of *validity claims* and *warranted assertibility*.

Bacon (2012) remarks that Habermas compares to Dewey in terms of their influence beyond academic philosophy. Habermas is today Germany's foremost public intellectual, frequently commenting on social and political issues and participating in political life. Although Habermas has not always associated himself with pragmatism, in his earliest writings he evidences an interest in approaches to questions of truth and knowledge which, he acknowledged, were anticipated by Peirce and Dewey.

Habermas summarised the importance of pragmatism in the following terms:

Alongside Marx and Kierkegaard [...] pragmatism emerges as the only approach that embraces modernity in its most radical forms, and acknowledges its contingencies, without sacrificing the very purpose of Western philosophy - namely, to try out explanations of who we are and who we would like to be, as individuals, as members of communities, and as persons *überhaupt* – that is, as man (HABERMAS, 2002, p. 229).

Bacon (2012) identified fallibilistic and anti-skepticistic footprints in Habermas' *Theory of Communicative Rationality*. Habermas praised the pragmatist combination of fallibilism with anti-skepticism, "and its naturalist approach to the human mind and its culture that refuses to yield to any kind of scientism" (HABERMAS, 2002 p. 228). And, like the classic pragmatists, Habermas defines knowledge as a construct generated and legitimated through social interaction. His claim is that society is structured around collective understandings and meanings which form the background in which what he calls 'validity claims' are raised.

The Habermasian concept of 'public sphere' and the pragmatic theme of 'community of inquirers' seem to address similar concerns. Early in his work<sup>2</sup>, Habermas examined how the notion of the public emerged in modern democratic societies and discovered that the social and political conditions of freedom of expression and of association that emerged in the eighteenth century led to the creation of what he calls the public sphere. Such an entity, located in no particular institution, consisted of the loose connection of venues within which citizens met and discussed matters of common interest on a footing of equality, being free of economic and political interests. The public was able to exert an influence and keep their government under check. Such democratic exercise became in itself a source of political legitimacy to which governments had to be responsive.

However, it is in the concepts of *validity claims* and *warranted assertibility* that the association between Habermas and Dewey emerges more objectively. Habermas outlines an idea of truth and communicative rationality<sup>3</sup> whose aim it is to raise and justify *validity claims*. Habermas proposes that there are three types of *validity claim*: truth, normative rightness and sincerity (HABERMAS, 1986, p. 137). These three types of claim are said to be raised in different 'worlds': the objective world, the intersubjective (or social) world, and the subjective (internal) world respectively. In the objective world, individuals make claims to the truth. In the intersubjective world,

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<sup>2</sup> *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962)

<sup>3</sup> *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981)



they make claims for rightness. And, in the subjective world, they are committed to expressing themselves with sincerity. These three types of validity are said to be different, and for any given claim one will be prominent and the others left implicit. Habermas seems to be describing in more depth the inner workings of a more developed form of the 'community of inquirers' where individuals methodically and systematically address relevant issues in order to warrantably assert their (provisional) findings and conclusions.

### Closing remarks

We began this article by examining the relevance and reach of pragmatism as a school of thought. Bernstein (2006) proposes the contributions made by pragmatism to other areas of philosophical discussion such as *Marxism*, *existentialism*, and *analytic philosophy* are worthy of consideration not only by their intrinsic merit but also because, in an important sense, pragmatism has anticipated and often implicitly informed them. Bernstein argues that the important conclusions in twentieth-century philosophy can be understood as "variations on pragmatic themes" (Bernstein, 2010, p. 43).

For Brandom (2002), pragmatism, as a movement centred on the primacy of the practical, began with Kant and the pragmatist legacy was later carried on in the twentieth-century by not only Peirce, James and Dewey, but also by the early Heidegger, the later Wittgenstein and such figures as Quine, Sellars, Davidson and Rorty.

Godfrey-Smith (2016) illustrates the role of the primacy of the practical in redefining patterns of conduct and reinterpreting philosophy using Dewey's life as an example. Dewey was brought up in small town Vermont, with horses and carts but died New York City in 1952, surrounded by skyscrapers. From steam power to atomic energy, Dewey's life bridged a crucial period of economic and technological advances in the development of America. His instrumental pragmatism is clearly a reflection of his life experience. Dewey argued that we should use our cognition and imagination as tools to solve the big questions concerning scientific, social, political and other issues that affect our lives. He defined inquiry and knowledge as instruments and claimed that there had been a persistent downgrading of the reality of relations in much of the Western philosophical tradition.

Godfrey-Smith (2016) remarks Dewey criticised earlier philosophers for not taking spatial, temporal and linear relations seriously. Aristotle, Descartes and Locke and other philosophers thought of relations as in some way dependent on our ideas. But Dewey thought that was a huge mistake and observed that, in standard philosophical discussions, you might come away with the impression that people never eat anything, never bump into objects, never have any kind of commerce or contact with things except of a very intellectual kind. Dewey rightly insisted that the parts of our lives that we think of as intellectual are mixed in, embedded within, a larger matrix of non-epistemic, or non-intellectual interaction with objects in our environments.

As we have seen, Dewey played a pivotal role in the transformation and popularisation of pragmatism as a public philosophy. His naturalism and instrumentalism, in particular, the idea that research on the practical effects of our thinking and actions is the most important thing that we humans do, served to add

more substance to Peirce's and James' original thinking. Furthermore, Dewey brought to pragmatism an ethical theory that neither Peirce nor James had foreseen. Dewey developed his research theory in order to establish a direct and organic relationship between experience, life and philosophy to create ways in which individuals could exist in a world with more social justice.

Cochran (2010) asserts that Dewey, under the influence of evolutionism, believed that we are adaptive beings that shape and are shaped by our natural and social environments. Dewey believed that the investigation of any type of problem involving natural or social questions, should be modelled according to scientific methods. The only significant difference between the two types of problem is the starting point and the degree of complexity in particular.

Natural science research begins with natural phenomena. Social science research begins with moral questions about human problems and the question of 'what ought to be done'. This type of investigation is more complex because it cannot employ the selective filters of the natural sciences, at the risk of being restricted to the physical, to the detriment of subjective human factors. However, the logical conditions that guide the research are the same. Both types of investigation are based on experience - the facts of an undetermined situation. And the end point of each one is the same: to obtain a sense of determination and confidence to be able to make *warranted* statements.

However, any type of resolution has always been viewed by Dewey (1939) as provisional, merely an extra step in the investigation process. For Dewey (1939), the conclusions of the investigations are part of a continuously renewed process. New questions arise, solutions that worked before become useless and we are forced to restart the investigation process.

Dewey (1939) defines and sets out his understanding of the aims of his research theory in the following terms. If any investigation is related to doubt, this admission carries with it an implication as to the purposes of the investigation. If the investigation begins in doubt, it ends in the institution of conditions that eliminate the need for doubt. These conditions can be designated by the words 'belief' and 'knowledge'. For reasons of method, as we have said before, Dewey prefers to use the term *warranted assertibility* because it is free of the ambiguities that link the investigation to some kind of assurance.

As to the origins of the concept, Putnam (2010) states that, although Dewey was greatly influenced by James' social psychology, *warranted assertibility* and its corollaries - anti-foundationalism and fallibilism - must be attributed to Peirce in his concern with the importance of the principles of formal logic in the processes of constituting any type of investigation. Thereupon, Dewey developed the basis of his own instrumental theory of knowledge in which reflection and inference are used as investigative tools organised in a logical structure in which propositions and judgments must culminate in legitimate and justifiable discourse.

And, on the subject of discourse, Brandom (1998) reminds us that, under the influence of the *German Idealism* of Kant and Hegel, the classical American pragmatists developed a system of thought that defines us as normative and discursive beings. The idea of individual consciousness is essentially Kantian, while the collective character of the mind is due to Hegel's formulations. Discourse, therefore, implies in inferentially articulated normativity.

We are constantly involved in discursive practices in which we have to explain and justify our actions, ask for and give reasons and this normative dimension separates us from beings who can feel, but are not capable of rational thinking. Brandom (1998) defines the role of communication and language, not only as an exchange of information, but as a means to rationally navigate between different opinions, projects, plans to allow an understanding between socially organised individuals. Language and speech, in addition to serving as means of cooperation, must also make clear what our ethical commitments are.

In closing, we understand that this is the essence of Dewey's concept of *warranted assertibility* and a point of intersection between a philosophy of conduct and a philosophy of language. Discourse implies in claims to truth and legitimacy, and produce effects and consequences for which we are socially responsible. We close this article with a quote from the neo-pragmatic Rorty on the central concerns of Dewey's moral and ethical philosophy:

Dewey rejects epistemological theories and replaces questions such as: 'Does this proposition represent the essence of reality?' With other questions such as: 'What would it be like to accept this as truth?', 'What happens if I do so?' 'What kinds of commitments would I be making?' (RORTY, 1982, p. 163).

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